

## 9. UNUSUAL CONGREGATION OF NAYAN *OVIS AMMON HODGSONI* BLYTH AT GYAM TSONA, NORTH SIKKIM

The wildlife of the trans-himalayas of north Sikkim is not so well known as the area is 'restricted' and is the boundary between Tibet (China) and India. One of the big animals found here about which not much information is available even in literature is the Nayan or the Great Tibetan Sheep.

On 10th December 1992 while on a winter survey of lakes in this region our jeep was immobilised with high-altitude problems. So I went to the nearest army unit for help. There, after a discussion about the local wildlife, the officer-in-charge rang up various look out points and on locating a herd of 'sheep' over the phone we went to Chhoilung Valley, near the lake Gyam Tsona.

There, spread over the stark, undulating landscape were five groups of a loosely scattered herd of Nayan on either side of the road which was in a sort of shallow valley. One group was to our left and four to our right. The cold-desert topography and elevation of c. 4900-5000 m makes distances very deceptive. The nearest animals were 200-500 m away and the farthest more than a kilometre away.

We counted 94 individuals. This was most unusual as local people reported congregation of not

more than 15 and usually 5. Most of them were adult males distinguished by their curving horns and dark head, neck and back. Many were also light coloured with shorter horns obviously females and sub-adults but it was difficult to do a sex count because of the distances and postures of the animals, some of which were grazing and moving away from us and some lying down.

Photographs were taken to record the total number using a 200 mm telephoto lens which was not very adequate. The animals were unafraid of the approaching jeep and not even startled when we got off. The nearest ones moved away only gradually feeding as they went. This behaviour was worth recording keeping in view the general opinion about wild animals in military zones.

I am grateful to Lt. Col. B.B. Singh for assisting me in sighting this unusual congregation.

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## 10. BLACKBUCKS USING THE NILGIRIS EASTERN SLOPES: A CORRIDOR CONNECTING MOYAR VALLEY AND PILLUR SLOPES FORESTS

The Nilgiri hills is flanked by two rivers flowing along the foothills and filling up the Lower Bhavani reservoir to the east of the hills. The river Bhavani originates in the Upper Nilgiris plateau and flows along an east-northeast gradient bordering the eastern slopes of the hills. The north-northeastern slopes are bordered by the Moyar river, which flows through a valley lying between the Nilgiris and Talamalai hills.

The Moyar valley holds a moderately disturbed stretch of forest, contiguous with Sigur Reserve Forest and Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary. The major vegetation type of this area is dry

deciduous and dry thorn forests. Moyar valley forests form an important corridor facilitating the movement of elephants and other animals between Western Ghats and Biligiri Rangan hills part of Eastern Ghats. These forests also support a population of about 200 Blackbucks, one of the four remaining populations of Blackbuck in Tamil Nadu (Ranjitsinh 1989). This area referred to as Sujjalkuttai forests is proposed to be declared as a wildlife sanctuary (Rodgers and Panwar 1988). There is a narrow stretch of forest along the Nilgiris eastern slopes connecting the Moyar valley forests to the Nellithurai and Pillur slopes forests to south-east of the hills. The Pillur